

Connecting the Dots: Progress Highlights

Aboriginal Workforce and
Economic Development in Alberta



October 2013



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Introduction

"For real change and improved results for Aboriginal people in Alberta, things would have to be done differently."¹

This was the key message in the report *Connecting the Dots: Aboriginal Workforce and Economic Development in Alberta*, released in May 2011. The report was the culmination of an 18-month engagement process led by a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) Committee² with Aboriginal leadership, communities and stakeholders. The MLA Committee proposed 30 recommendations for increasing the participation of Aboriginal people in the province's workforce and economy.

The MLA Committee observed in its report that while there were numerous activities, programs and initiatives for Aboriginal people, more needed to be done to "connect the dots." There was a critical need to improve the linkages with Aboriginal communities, with other governments and with organizations by increasing collaboration, coordination, communication, capacity, community-based decision-making and most importantly, commitment. A collective effort could lead to different and better results.

The *Government of Alberta Response to Connecting the Dots* was also released in May 2011. In order to support implementation, the Government of Alberta outlined five

themes, which encompassed the recommendations put forth by the MLA Committee:

- » Collaboration, Coordination and Commitment;
- » Education, Learning and Community;
- » Urban Aboriginal People;
- » Capacity Building – Individual and Community; and
- » Improving Communication and Awareness.

Within these themes are strategic priorities that focused on the shared responsibility of working in partnership to find solutions. The *Government of Alberta Response* also included a commitment to release a progress report within two years.

This *Connecting the Dots: Progress Highlights* report is not an exhaustive list of initiatives, but rather snapshots of change highlighting how things are being done differently. Over the past two years, the Government of Alberta, through cross-ministry communication,³ has been tracking progress related to the themes listed above. From this, particular stories and activities have been selected to convey how partnerships and collaborations are positively impacting Aboriginal people and communities, and the province of Alberta overall.

¹ *Connecting the Dots: Aboriginal Workforce and Economic Development in Alberta*, Executive Summary (p. 4)

² MLA Committee members: Verlyn Olson (Chair), MLA Wetaskiwin-Camrose, Pearl Calahasen, MLA Lesser Slave Lake, and former MLAs Tony Vandermeer (Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview) and Evan Berger (Livingstone-Macleod)

³ Government of Alberta cross-ministry partners: Aboriginal Relations, Enterprise and Advanced Education, Education, Human Services, Service Alberta, Culture, Justice and Attorney General, and Corporate Human Resources

Collaboration, Coordination and Commitment

Strategic Priority #1

The Government of Alberta develop an Aboriginal Workforce Strategy that addresses the workforce and skills training needs and goals of urban, rural, remote and young Aboriginal people in Alberta and includes opportunities for continued collaborative planning.

Aboriginal Workforce Strategy

Supporting Aboriginal individuals in finding jobs and increasing their skills is one way the Government of Alberta is working with communities and industry to improve quality of life and meet the province's labour needs.

The creation of the Aboriginal Workforce Strategy was a key priority in *Connecting the Dots* and work is well underway. Aboriginal people living off-reserve and off-settlement had an unemployment rate of 11.5 per cent in 2012, about 7 percentage points higher than the non-Aboriginal rate of 4.6 per cent. This strategy will help narrow the gap.

The Aboriginal Workforce Strategy Steering Committee, which was assembled in 2012, is leading this work and is an example of doing things differently. A comment that the MLA Committee often heard was how important it was for Aboriginal people to be "at the table." With this committee, they are.

"The Chiefs have told us that youth in their communities want to obtain meaningful employment. Unfortunately, not all of our youth are ready for the workforce. It is our hope that a collaborative workforce strategy will provide opportunities for our youth to gain the skills and education required to find and keep meaningful employment. To be effective, all levels of government, First Nations/Aboriginal peoples, Canada and Alberta need to work together, support each other and agree on positive changes to improve outcomes for all Aboriginal people."

- Darlene Plamondon, Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta

The committee is cross-sectoral and includes representatives of various provincial government ministries, as well as representation from the three First Nation Treaty organizations in Alberta – Treaty No. 6, Treaty No. 7 and Treaty No. 8; Aseniwuche Winewak, a non-status Aboriginal community; and both the Metis Settlements General Council and the Metis Nation of Alberta Association, represented by Rupertsland Institute. Rounding out the committee are representatives from several

federal departments, the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, as well as the Alberta Chamber of Resources and an urban Aboriginal organization, which bring industry, municipality and service provider voices to the table.⁴

The committee has focused on building relationships, sharing information, identifying priorities and discussing the critical elements they want to see in an Aboriginal Workforce Strategy. It has been respectful of Aboriginal culture and diversity. The committee is co-chaired by a government representative and, on a rotating basis, an Aboriginal representative. A particular focus of the committee is the young and growing Aboriginal population and preparing youth to contribute to and benefit from Alberta's wealth and quality of life. The strategy is a work in progress and is expected to be released and implemented in 2014.

Northwest Aboriginal Participation Initiative

Northwest Alberta is home to more First Nations and Aboriginal communities than any other part of the province. When the MLA Committee met with Aboriginal communities for *Connecting the Dots*, leadership told them that for their communities to keep moving forward,

community collaborative planning was key. The Northwest Service Delivery Region of Alberta Human Services took this to heart, and to action, by re-engaging with Aboriginal communities.

Since March 2012, the Northwest Aboriginal Participation Initiative has grown to involve 18 First Nations, four Metis settlements, and two non-status Aboriginal communities. The initiative focuses on working with communities to create community action plans that will lead to increased employment and economic opportunity. Some of the Aboriginal communities involved had workforce-related community plans, others were just beginning the process. The region engaged the services of a consultant to provide on-the-ground support to communities and to develop tools for skills inventories, organizational processes, governance and community capacity development.

Nancy Schneider, director of the Northwest Alberta Works program says, "It was important the work be owned by the community. We are there to facilitate and assist. Whatever is happening is developed by the community for the community."

Lynn Bakewell is the Aboriginal Partnership Coordinator for the Northwest Region, a new position created two years ago. She can't say enough about how positive the work with the communities in the region has been: "They are all embracing community planning of one form or another. It's really exciting to see the desire to move ahead, to improve and make life better for the people who are living there. It's very motivating."

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⁴ Steering Committee member partners include: Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations, Treaty 7 Management Corporation, Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta, Metis Settlements General Council, Metis Nation of Alberta Association (represented by Rupertsland Institute), Aseniwuche Winewak Nation, Government of Alberta, Government of Canada, Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, Alberta Chambers of Resources and the Calgary Urban Aboriginal Initiative

Lynn sees her role as a liaison worker who listens as communities are working through where they want to go and identifying the steps to reach that point. Lynn says, "Communities are at different stages with different needs, but they are all working towards increasing participation in the workforce."

Nancy and Lynn both appreciate the strong working relationships established in the region and hope to broaden community collaboration and coordination by bringing in other areas of government, other stakeholders and more industry partners. Their goal is for the Northwest community planning initiative to keep evolving alongside the Aboriginal Workforce Strategy that is being developed. They'd like to see the community action plans become "living documents" that will help grow Aboriginal communities.

Alberta-First Nations Opportunities Forum 2012

The Government of Alberta knows that strong, resilient Aboriginal communities are essential to the continued success and prosperity of the province.

The investments made in these communities today will benefit all Albertans in the years to come. One of the government's priorities is working with First Nations leaders to enhance economic participation and to improve educational achievements for First Nations people.

In support of this, the province hosted the Alberta-First Nations Opportunities Forum on December 10-11, 2012 at Government House in Edmonton.



The forum brought together Premier Alison Redford, Cabinet Ministers and First Nations leaders from across the province for a conversation on various key issues, including economic development and workforce

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opportunities, educational success for First Nations students, community well-being, children in care and consultation on land and natural resource development. It was also a chance to explore new areas for partnership and cooperation.

First Nations Chiefs commented that they felt this conversation was positive and important. At the close of the forum, Premier Redford committed to continuing to work with First Nations Chiefs to create opportunities for First Nations to contribute to and take advantage of Alberta's social and economic life.

Strategic Priority #2

The Province, First Nations, Metis Settlements General Council (MSGC), Metis Nation of Alberta Association (MNAA), other Aboriginal organizations and the federal government increase collaboration to improve coordination, reduce duplication and increase innovation in the delivery of labour market programs and services for Aboriginal people in Alberta.

Northeast Alberta Apprenticeship Initiative

The Government of Alberta and industry are collaborating with Tribal Chiefs Employment and Training Services

Association (TCETSA) to improve apprenticeship training and employment opportunities in the Northeast Alberta.

In 2012/13, the Ministry of Human Services supported the Association to create a new approach to apprenticeship training. The resulting project, the Northeast Alberta Apprenticeship Initiative (NEAAI), is a First Nation-driven project and is designed to provide Aboriginal people with essential skills training, trades preparation, jobs, entry into apprenticeship programs, trade certification and the opportunity to address labour challenges in the province.

To support this project, Human Services partnered with the Ministries of Enterprise and Advanced Education and Aboriginal Relations to provide one-year pilot funding to TCETSA in 2013/14 to assist in launching this four-year Initiative. To support successful implementation of the NEAAI, Government of Alberta departments will also provide a number of in-kind supports. Additional funding for NEAAI is being provided by industry.

This program reflects the Government of Alberta's commitment to collaborate with First Nations on a community-driven initiative to support First Nations to develop

"During my 20 years as an Aboriginal Employment and Training Services Manager and Counselor in Northeast Alberta, I observed a pattern of under-representation of Aboriginal workers in the region's workforce. Four years ago, TCETSA set out to find, create and implement solutions to this situation. We conducted extensive research into our barriers to employment, examined best practices, and met with industry, First Nations, government, and post-secondary institutions.

These efforts to find solutions that could make a real difference took us through a pilot project for the T.R.E.A.T.Y. Model, an integrated services delivery process, in which the social dependency rate in the pilot site was reduced to 24 per cent from 78 per cent. We worked collaboratively to create demand-driven employment opportunities with regional industry partners and put 301 people into sustained work.

We have now launched the Northeast Alberta Apprenticeship Initiative with a primary goal of increasing the number of people in the trades. The project will enable local First Nations, and Albertans in general, a chance to guarantee themselves a secured financial future and meaningful employment by participating in the oil and gas industry via apprenticeship."

- Eva John-Gladue, Program Manager, NEAAI⁵

⁵ Partners involved in NEAAI include: TCV First Nations, Saddle Lake First Nation, Alberta Enterprise and Advanced Education, Alberta Human Services – Northeast Region, Alberta Aboriginal Relations, OSUM Oil Sands Corporation, Statoil Canada Limited, Canadian Natural Resources Limited and Primco-Dene.

a skilled workforce in their communities. It is anticipated that through NEAAI, the Association will create increased opportunities for First Nations people to obtain apprenticeship and jobs both locally in the Northeast Region and across Alberta.

Labour Market Training for Metis Settlements

On March 12, 2013, the Government of Alberta and the Metis Settlements General Council achieved a historic milestone with the signing of the Metis Settlements Long-term Governance and Funding Arrangements.

The agreement, which was signed at Government House in Edmonton by Premier Alison Redford, Aboriginal Relations Minister Robin Campbell, Metis Settlements General Council President Randy Hardy and the Chairs of the eight Alberta Metis Settlements, will provide \$85 million over 10 years to strengthen the settlements' local governments and accountability; enhance educational outcomes and economic opportunities; and improve infrastructure and essential services.

One of the commitments of the Long-term Arrangements is the development of a labour market training initiative, which will help settlement members identify and access employment training and educational programs, and will be focused on identifying regional job opportunities offered by industry.

Aboriginal Relations and the Metis Settlements General Council have begun working on an employment training framework that will outline the broad direction and scope for the initiative. Human Services and Enterprise and Advanced Education are also providing advice to support the framework's development and will be key partners during its implementation.



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First Nations Working Together on Labour Market Training

Two Alberta First Nation communities, from opposite ends of the province, are teaming up to help each other through an innovative training and employment partnership.

The Fort McKay First Nation, located north of Fort McMurray, needs workers for a number of planned capital projects. Fort McKay Nation industries have hired as many First Nations people in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo as are qualified and available, but is still in need of more workers. The Kanai Nation in the south part of province, also known as the Blood Tribe, has workers, but not enough jobs.

The answer is to join forces and help each other. With the support of the provincial and federal governments, a pilot project has been launched to train members of the Blood Tribe to work on projects in Fort McKay.



For the Kanai Nation and Fort McKay First Nation, this pilot project will not only create jobs, but will also increase the quality of life for both communities.

The Fort McKay Nation has developed and launched a major capital projects plan that includes building a fire hall, an amphitheatre and a youth centre, as well as road construction and maintenance. These projects are scheduled to begin this summer and will require several hundred workers.

For the Blood Tribe, this pilot project will support up to 120 members to transition into work. The first round of training will start with 24 individuals. The training has been designed to prepare Blood Tribe members, who were successful in the recruitment and assessment phase, to work in a camp environment. The training will begin on the Kanai Nation and is intended to expand to Fort McKay and will include a work site boot camp as well as cultural training about the Cree and Dene culture of the Fort McKay people.

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Strategic Priority #3

The Government of Alberta review programs and services that support Aboriginal economic development in order to increase coordination across ministries and to streamline grant funding processes and applications.

Monthly Funders Dialogue

With so many stakeholders involved in funding economic development projects, it is necessary to increase communication across ministries and governments to better support Aboriginal communities.

Led by the Aboriginal Economic Partnerships Branch of Aboriginal Relations, the monthly funders dialogue meetings are held between the Ministries of Human Services, Aboriginal Relations and the federal government, through Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada.

This monthly dialogue provides an effective way for participants to stay up to date on the work being done with Aboriginal communities and it highlights the collaborative approach that ministries are undertaking to ensure that information is being shared.

Several co-funded projects have been developed as a result of the dialogue meetings, including:

- » The O'Chiese Safety Services Limited Partnership, which is developing policy, a scope of practice and a company manual for providing medical services to oil field and construction work sites;
- » Providing Fort McMurray #468 First Nation with assistance to develop strong governance and organizational policies for their Nation; and
- » Providing Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation with assistance to secure professional services to develop a centralized governance process for their Nation.

Economic Development Workshops

Accessing economic funding opportunities from the federal and provincial governments can be a complex process for Aboriginal communities. In 2011, Aboriginal Relations, in collaboration with various other provincial and federal departments, began developing workshops to increase awareness of these opportunities.

One participant commented, "It was a great start to get the conversation and information sharing going for future projects."

To date, six workshops have been hosted in Grande Prairie, Slave Lake, Cold Lake, Fort McMurray, Lac La Biche and Lethbridge, providing opportunities to build relationships and have discussions.

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Workshop content is continuously updated based on feedback from participants, and has expanded from grant information to include areas such as project management, strategic management, budget planning and trends in economic development.

Education, Learning and Community

Strategic Priority #4

The Government of Alberta work with First Nations and Metis leaders and other Aboriginal communities and organizations, the federal government and educational institutions to achieve better educational outcomes for Aboriginal students in both the K-12 and post-secondary areas.

Memorandum of Understanding for First Nations Education in Alberta

First Nations education in Alberta will be improved in the coming years under an agreement signed between the Assembly of Treaty Chiefs in Alberta, the Government of Canada, represented by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada and the Government of Alberta, represented by the Ministries of Education and Aboriginal Relations.

"We need to move from a 20th century school house model into a 21st century education system; and we need to be part of the solution."

- Clayton Kootenay, MOU Team Lead for Treaty 6, 7 and 8.

The Memorandum of Understanding for First Nations Education in Alberta (MOU), which was signed February 2010, commits

all parties to work together on more than 40 commitments to improve and restructure First Nations education in Alberta.

At the heart of the MOU is the shared vision where "First Nation students in Alberta are achieving or exceeding the full educational outcomes, levels and successes of all other students in Alberta."

The MOU is considered to be the most comprehensive multilateral First Nations education agreement in the country. It includes a commitment to establish a Treaty No. 6, Treaty No. 7 and Treaty No. 8 Indigenous Knowledge and Wisdom Centre, which will create a centre of education expertise for First Nations in Alberta.

The draft long-term strategic action plan for the MOU is being developed collaboratively by First Nations, the province and the federal government. Currently under development, and pending review, the long-term strategic action plan is expected to be finalized in 2013.

Vaulting into a Communications Career

Achievements in post-secondary education have a way of setting the stage to give back to the community. Jenelle Lizotte is a young Metis woman from Peace River who received a \$6,000 Northern Alberta Development Council (NADC) Bursary in 2009 to complete her Media and Communications degree at University Canada West.

Following her degree, Jenelle returned to Peace River with an ambitious dream: to start a regional magazine. Along with Tormagh Van Slyke, a fellow Communications degree and NADC Bursary recipient, the two launched **theVAULTmagazine** in September 2011. Supported through advertising and distributed free to 19 Peace Country communities, the magazine offers alternative perspectives on news, entertainment and culture to area residents. The magazine was recognized through the 2012 Davis Awards by the Peace River and District Chamber of Commerce.

Continuing to contribute to the local Peace Country culture, Jenelle recently released *Move Up*, a glossy magazine highlighting the business and lifestyle of Alberta's Peace Region. As well, check out the video that Jenelle developed as part of the NADC's Be North Be You contest, on **Why it Rocks to Live in Northern Alberta**.

Siksika Story Robe: A Community Literacy Project

Aboriginal people living in the Siksika Nation are learning about the importance of literacy and their own history through a project that draws its roots from Blackfoot culture.



"I did come back to the Peace Region and it gave me the opportunity to start my business in a community where I feel secure and comfortable. I don't think I would have had these opportunities in another community."

— Jenelle Lizotte

The Siksika Nation, located 95 km southeast of Calgary, owns and operates the independent Old Sun Community College. The college, named after Chief Old Sun, a successful warrior and leader of one of the largest Blackfoot Confederacy bands, celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2011 by commissioning a very special project: a traditional Story Robe or Winter Count.

Working with Siksika ceremonial knowledge keepers, a buffalo robe was decorated with symbols representing significant periods in the history of the Siksika people. The robe is a pictorial calendar that highlights, honours and documents the history of the community.

"The Story Robe has been a real catalyst for the community," says Dr. Vivian Ayoungman, team lead for the project. "It really lifted our learning spirit and has helped the community grow in so many ways."

To build on the success of the Story Robe, Old Sun Community College applied for and received funding from Alberta Enterprise and Advanced Education to develop a literacy project and learning tool. The objectives of the project were twofold: to promote literacy by re-introducing the community's traditional way of storytelling and encouraging students to document and record their life stories in both picture and text; and secondly, to produce prints of the community-created traditional Story Robe with an accompanying booklet that describes each historical symbol and the event it depicts.

For the Siksika Nation, the Story Robe was a community effort that has led to some memorable collaborations and partnerships. For the students involved, there has been an increase in self-esteem, confidence and pride in their heritage. Students that would normally be challenged by writing

are taking the risk to write because the topic is meaningful to them.

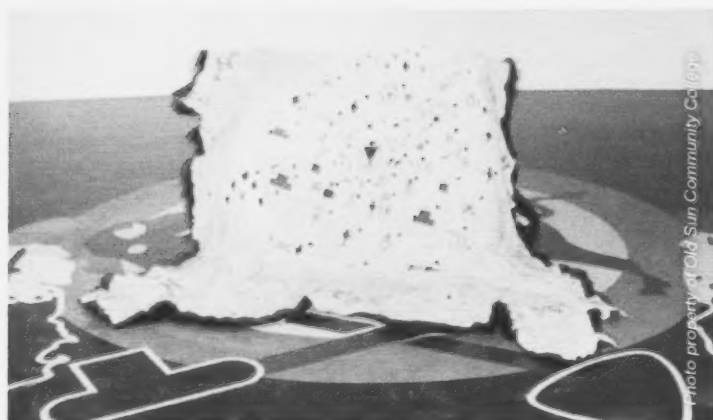
"When we nourish the learning spirit, students grow in many positive ways; from the students in kindergarten, who asked, 'Teacher can I draw too?' to adults who found it interesting to go down memory lane," says Dr. Ayoungman.

The college is now working on an extension of the Story Robe project by developing a textbook and writing resource on Siksika knowledge and individual family histories to be used as part of the curriculum for its Blackfoot 10, 20 and 30 high-school level courses.

First Nations, Metis and Inuit Collaborative Framework Model

Student success improves when parents are engaged in their children's education. A shared responsibility to improve First Nations, Metis and Inuit (FNMI) student success is a provincial priority between school authorities and FNMI families, parents and communities.

The Ministry of Education's FNMI Services worked with school authorities to identify ways of eliminating the achievement gap and increasing participation of FNMI parents, school authorities and FNMI communities to create a holistic collaborative framework model as a guide in planning. The *FNMI Collaborative Framework* model was created with district FNMI teams and Treaty No. 6, Treaty No. 7, Treaty No. 8 and Metis Elders and educators to support effective collaborative partnership for meeting FNMI students' unique needs.



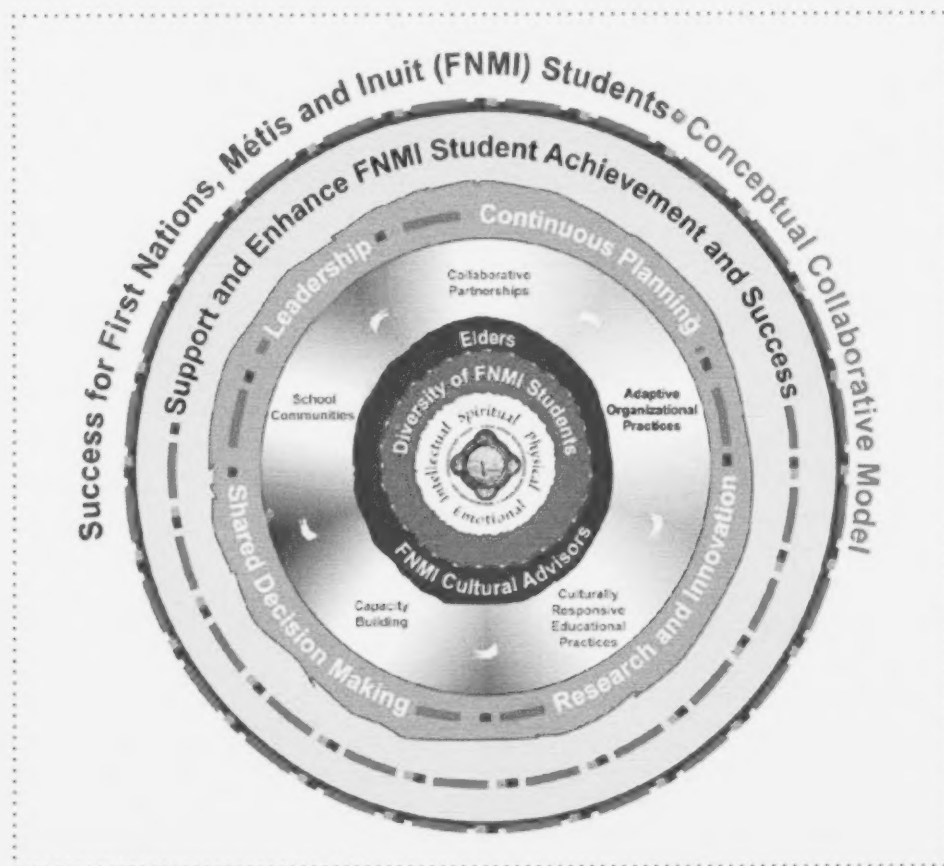
The college is now working on an extension of the Story Robe project by developing a textbook and writing resource on Siksika knowledge and individual family histories to be used as part of the curriculum for its Blackfoot 10, 20 and 30 high-school level courses.

The model serves as a tool to assist school authorities to develop their action plans based on local contexts. Student success is essential and reflects a sense of pride, confidence and knowledge of one's culture and identity. First Nations, Metis and Inuit communities, consisting of Cree, Blackfoot, Dene, Salteaux and Metis are integral partners in ensuring that accurate and genuine local context is provided.

The Ministry of Education also supports school authorities in the development and implementation of FNMI collaborative initiatives by raising provincial awareness and understanding of FNMI cultures. Over

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the last three years, there has been much evidence of an increase in FNMI parent and community engagement across the province. This success may be based on the relationship building and the sharing of local knowledge between FNMI communities and school authorities.



Urban Aboriginal People

Strategic Priority #5

The Government of Alberta, through partnerships, develop strategies and actions for supporting Aboriginal people who choose to transition from reserves, settlements, rural, or remote communities to urban areas for employment, education or training, or to transition between schools, employers and workplaces within urban areas.

From Dialogue to Memorandum

Aboriginal people accounted for 6.2 per cent (220,700) of Alberta's total population (3,567,975) in 2011. Aboriginal people accounted for 5.4 per cent of the total population in the Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) of Edmonton and 2.8 per cent of the total population in the CMA of Calgary.



Urban Aboriginal communities have unique needs, and the Government of Alberta and the City of Edmonton have committed to work together to help address these needs under a new agreement.

The Memorandum of Coordination and Collaboration, which was signed by Aboriginal Relations Minister Robin Campbell and Edmonton Mayor Stephen Mandel in May 2013, is aimed at improving outcomes for Aboriginal people in Edmonton by focusing on the areas of youth leadership and development; economic development; transitions; support for opportunities for Aboriginal women; and safe and secure communities.

The agreement is consistent with feedback from Aboriginal communities who expressed a desire for government to work more closely on issues that impact Aboriginal people in Edmonton. It will be a means to ensuring that Aboriginal organizations and communities are provided with effective and efficient access to government programs and services.

Much of this feedback came from the Edmonton Aboriginal Gathering and Dialogue, which was hosted by the Government of Alberta, Government of Canada and the City of Edmonton on February 7, 2012. The event brought together 133 Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organizations, including governments, service organizations and businesses, to renew efforts to improve the quality of life of Aboriginal people in Edmonton.

From the *What We Heard* report, which summarized the conversations at the gathering, a participant commented: "This forum and others like it present opportunities to share information. An ongoing dialogue process is required so all partners can continue to work together to greater target the needs of Aboriginal people in the city.

Collaboration Works

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development works with food processing employers across the province to assist them with workforce planning and retention. Human Services' Alberta Works in Lethbridge helps people find jobs. A chance conversation between the two ministries in the summer of 2012 identified some common ground and sparked a partnership, which expanded to include a local employer and a local training provider. With funding from Human Services, a project for urban Aboriginal people in Lethbridge was developed that has been getting real results.

Agriculture and Rural Development contacted a Lethbridge-based agri-processor about participating in the project and found that the company was eager to get involved. Alberta Works contracted a local training

provider, Lethbridge Aboriginal Career and Employment Centre, who brought their client contacts and training expertise to the project. The idea was to start with a small group of participants, a supportive training environment and a job upon successful completion of the training. The result so far is that 18 First Nations people were trained and are successfully working.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development works with food processing employers across the province to assist them with workforce planning and retention. Human Services Alberta Works in Lethbridge helps people find jobs. A chance conversation between the two led to a successful collaboration.

The key to the success of this project is the steps put in place prior to and during the training to ensure that the needs of the participants and the employer were being met. Discussions took place about cultural expectations, working conditions, job readiness and job retention. The employer and the program participants met during the training and following hiring, and the employer made sure other First Nation staff would be on shift to support the new employees. The training even included a practice run on local public transit to and from work.

For Bonnie Gedlaman, a supervisor with the Alberta Works Office and Coby Eagle Bear, who oversaw the contract for the project, this training program had the elements required for supporting Aboriginal people to find and keep jobs. Bonnie says, "I don't want employers missing out on a fantastic labour pool."

Capacity Building – Individual and Community

Strategic Priority #6

The Government of Alberta support internships with Aboriginal communities, industry, training providers, other levels of government to ensure Aboriginal Albertans have access to the skills, tools, information and opportunities needed to increase capacity at the individual and/or community level.

Opening the Circle Community of Practice Initiative

Aboriginal Recruitment and Retention in the Alberta Public Service

There are numerous benefits to improving the recruitment and retention rates of Aboriginal people in the Alberta Public Service – especially when considering that Aboriginal people are the fastest growing population in Canada and Alberta's future talent pool.

Through the Opening the Circle Aboriginal Recruitment and Retention Community of Practice Initiative, the Ministry of Human

Services sought employment advice and wisdom from an Aboriginal Leadership Advisory team, including First Nation and Metis Elders, other levels of government, Aboriginal community service providers and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educational institutions. This desire to improve inclusiveness in the Government of Alberta has included the development of an Opening the Circle Internship Program.

In spring 2013, there were six interns taking part in the program, as well as three former interns who are now permanent staff.

Creating a welcoming place of work and improving the diversity of the public service involves considering the system as a whole. As a community of practice, Opening the Circle continues to evolve and will seek to carry on in developing a workforce that is representative of Alberta society.

"The internship has been very positive . . . when I go home at night, I feel proud of the work that we are doing. The inclusion of Elders hosting sweats, pipe ceremonies and smudging for events in the workplace has really made me feel at home. It's time to help influence the change that we want to see . . . I never thought I would be able to get a job like that. But the Creator has a plan for us all."

- Connor Kerr, Human Services Intern

Getting to Know Each Other Better

Shannon Buffalo, the Director of Socio-Economic Development for the Samson Cree Nation, had some unfinished business. In 2005, she was nearing the completion of her social work diploma when she had to put it on hold, although it has always been in the back of her mind. Shannon wanted to have the credentials to support her career, increase her competencies on the job and very importantly, to be a role model for her children, grandchildren and her community. Last year, Shannon took a leave of absence from her job to complete her social work diploma courses at Maskwacis Cultural College in Hobbema and is now doing her practicum at the Wetaskiwin Alberta Works Centre.⁶

The Wetaskiwin Alberta Works Centre is one of the busiest in Central Region. On any given day between 125 to 150 people come through the doors. Of this, approximately 50 per cent are of Aboriginal descent. One of Shannon's goals with pursuing a practicum with the Wetaskiwin office was to understand the provincial realm and look at things through a different lens. She wanted to learn from the programs, processes and procedures used by the province and see what could be done on reserve to try to improve the flow and bridge the gaps between on- and off-reserve services for First Nations people. In her role as a director with the Samson Nation, she works with 11 programs, including different funding agencies and both provincial and federal government departments.



Shannon wanted to have the credentials to support her career, increase her competencies on the job and very importantly, to be a role model for her children, grandchildren and her community.

Lisa Bortnak is the Supervisor of the Wetaskiwin Alberta Works Centre and is overseeing Shannon's practicum. As part of Shannon's learning contract, Lisa is exposing her to all aspects of the Alberta Works mandate.

Lisa believes the practicum works both ways: "It's a learning experience for staff and myself. Shannon is learning but so are we . . . things we didn't know. We are also gaining knowledge of her culture."

⁶ The goals of Alberta Works are to help unemployed people find and keep jobs, help employers meet their need for skilled workers and help Albertans with low incomes cover their basic costs of living. Alberta Works achieves these goals through its four program areas: Employment and Training Services, Income Support, Health Benefits and Child Support Services.

Shannon sums up her experience this way: "Fostering a positive and healthy network system ensures equal and greater opportunities for all."

Shannon and Lisa both agree that a big benefit is networking with neighbours.

"Building our relationship with the surrounding First Nations has been ongoing, but Shannon's practicum is enhancing it," says Lisa.

Shannon sums up her experience this way: "Fostering a positive and healthy network system ensures equal and greater opportunities for all."

Shannon's practicum ended in June and she will receive her diploma at convocation in the fall. She's looking forward to returning to her job armed with a lot more knowledge and a much bigger network of support.

Developing Labour Force Surveys in Aboriginal Communities

Understanding the unique employment and educational make-up of each Aboriginal community is integral to strategic labour market planning.

Over 20 Aboriginal communities have developed or are in the process of developing labour force surveys, with funding from the Ministry of Human Services. This includes surveying working-age individuals in order to get an understanding of the composition of current education and skills levels in the community, in conjunction with considering which skills are in demand in the labour market. Connections can be made between these local labour market opportunities and

survey findings to aid in the creation of labour market strategies to address employment and training gaps/needs.

The Labour Force Survey results are the property of the respective communities that developed them. With the resulting survey analysis, Aboriginal communities are in a better position to develop initiatives that support training and job opportunities.

The Peerless Trout First Nation recently completed a labour force survey project. The final report included an analysis of the data collected, identified trends and findings and a series of recommendations. As a result, the Peerless Trout First Nation is currently implementing initiatives in areas including: infrastructure development; training and skills development to meet local construction demand; business plan development; and work with oil and gas companies.

Partners in Learning

Staff working for First Nations in Central Alberta were able to improve their counselling skills to better help on-reserve clients thanks to an outreach project that brought professional development courses to their doorsteps.

In 2012, First Nations in Central Alberta, the Ministry of Human Services and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) undertook a project in partnership to offer training to staff from different First Nations closer to home. As First Nations organizations often tend to have a small staff with a big workload, it can be difficult for staff to get away for professional development. Creating a learning partnership is helping staff develop new skills and it is building capacity within organizations.

Each partner in the project contributed to the arrangement: Human Services provided the funding for the training/facilitators; First Nations provided space rent-free for the training; and AANDC paid travel expenses for First Nations staff within Central Alberta to attend the training. Eight First Nations in Central Alberta were involved in the project. The courses were held at Siksika Nation, Louis Bull First Nation, Ermineskin Nation, Rocky Mountain House and Hobbema, with approximately 80 people participating.

Dwayne Eagle Child, a job coach for the Maskwacis Employment Centre in Hobbema, attended all eight courses.

"I feel the training provided me with more assurance in working with clients every day, the group learning was invaluable. I have utilized many tools and techniques with several of my clients," he says.

Miles Kayfish, Aboriginal Partnerships Liaison at the Camrose Alberta Works Centre, helped to oversee this project and felt the training was well-received and important that it be on-reserve. He believes the neighbouring First Nations got to know each other better – their issues and their cultures, for example, the Blackfoot and the Cree. Local Alberta Works staff also attended some of the on-reserve courses to help increase their awareness of issues their First Nations counterparts are facing.



"I would encourage those who took the training to actively participate in the lives of the clients we serve by being poignant, vigilant and creative in the process of engaging them into employment, career, training and apprenticeships," Dwayne echoes.

The general feedback that Miles received from participants was about the positive learning that took place and the eagerness to try something new at their own workplaces.

"I would encourage those who took the training to actively participate in the lives of the clients we serve by being poignant, vigilant and creative in the process of engaging them into employment, career, training and apprenticeships," Dwayne echoes.

Strategic Priority #7

The Government of Alberta continues to improve internet connectivity where feasible, for Aboriginal communities for the purposes of education, training and economic development.

Internet Connectivity in Aboriginal Communities in Alberta

Internet access is crucial in rural areas without immediate access to educational and training institutions. With many Aboriginal communities located in rural Alberta, the internet facilitates economic, educational and social opportunities.

The Final Mile Rural Community Program has recently approved 23 projects to provide broadband access to locations not served and address gaps in rural Alberta. Of the 23 projects approved, six are First Nation-based and one is Metis-based.



Recognizing the importance of internet connectivity, the Alberta SuperNet was built to provide a broadband network for public institutions across the province – including schools, hospitals, libraries and municipalities. This included connecting 429 rural communities, including over 40 First Nation and Metis communities.

Further building upon previous connectivity gains, the Government of Alberta's Final Mile Rural Connectivity Initiative (a joint effort between Service Alberta and Agriculture and Rural Development) is working to connect Alberta households not currently served with high-speed internet. The Final Mile Rural Community Program is one element of this initiative that has recently approved 23 projects to provide broadband access to locations not served and address gaps in rural Alberta. Of the 23 projects approved, six are First Nation-based and one is Metis-based.

The Final Mile Rural Connectivity Initiative is bringing additional connectivity to Albertans and is close to the government commitment of 98 per cent coverage.

Improving Communication and Awareness

Strategic Priority #8

The Government of Alberta identify opportunities to make it easier for Aboriginal people to connect with programs and services for Aboriginal people and with programs and services available to all Albertans. The Government of Alberta will also explore ways to improve communication between ministries that serve Aboriginal people.

Alberta Aboriginal Training and Jobs Facebook Page

Getting the word out about potential jobs is what Human Services' Alberta Aboriginal Training and Jobs Facebook page sets out to do. The page provides job supports tools, along with news on events of economic and social importance with an Aboriginal focus, including career fairs, achievement awards and activities at local Alberta Works Centres.

Job information isn't as much about checking the classified ads anymore – the Alberta Aboriginal Training and Jobs page provides a centralized information source in an informal environment. With over 1,595 “likes,” the Facebook page has the capacity to reach even more people as Facebook users share and comment on page information. Staff from across Alberta, alongside with businesses, are inputting their events and news, allowing for Aboriginal Albertans to access economic opportunities in ways that work for them.



New Web Resources for Aboriginal People

Finding the right information to plan your education, accessing funding for schooling or getting help looking for work can be overwhelming. The Government of Alberta's website, alis.alberta.ca, is trying to make it easier for Aboriginal people to get the information that would help them the most.⁷

⁷ ALIS is provided through a partnership of Alberta Human Services, Alberta Education and Alberta Enterprise and Advanced Education



In April 2013, ALIS (Alberta Learning Information Service) launched a new set of web pages for Aboriginal people. It's a one-stop shop that includes career, learning and work information, including links to Aboriginal organizations, provincial and federal government programs, as well as resources for counselors and other professionals that work with Aboriginal people.

To ensure the web pages were relevant, an advisory committee was established. Les Skinner is Metis and was a member of the advisory committee. He graduated from the University of Alberta in 2012 and is an intern with the Government of Alberta. Les says, "I brought more of an on-the-ground perspective having gone through this myself and knowing how it actually works and what's available, especially in areas like student funding."

The new web pages link to a variety of videos that feature Aboriginal people offering a personal perspective on topics such as career choices, academic upgrading and attending college or university. There is also information on student funding, scholarships and bursaries, some of which are specific to Aboriginal people. To check out the new web pages, go to:

alis.alberta.ca/aboriginalresources

Strategic Priority #9

Culture and Community Spirit, Aboriginal Relations and Employment and Immigration, with other ministries as appropriate, develop initiatives that support a greater sense of belonging for Aboriginal people in the workplace and/or community.

"The support from the Commission has been greatly beneficial to our community. Our work has also provided some tools to effectively address racism and discrimination against Aboriginal people in our community. We believe the work we are doing today will only make our city a more inclusive and welcoming community tomorrow."

- Jacinda Weiss, Executive Director, Aboriginal Council of Lethbridge

Community Organizations Building Increased Understanding about Human Rights

The Aboriginal Council of Lethbridge (ACL) will have more support to combat racism thanks to help from the Alberta Human Rights Commission (AHRC) and a grant from the Human Rights Education Multiculturalism Fund.

The groups came together beginning in the fall of 2010 to develop a support system for individuals and community agencies to assist victims of racism and discrimination, alongside with training and awareness programs. Through this initiative, the Commission was able to gain information and examples that reflect Aboriginal experiences, along with building trust and understanding with the community. This information was then used to develop case studies for AHRC's "Human Rights in the Workplace" workshops.

Similarly, capacity has been developed in Lethbridge for the Council to deliver its own "Human Rights in the Workforce" workshop. ACL has delivered this workshop in collaboration with several Aboriginal and youth organizations.

Through its human rights work, the Council has identified the need for tools to help prevent and deal with discrimination, and will continue this work in 2013. Bringing together the expertise of numerous areas helps to ensure that Aboriginal perspectives are well-represented in human rights activities.

New Tribe Magazine Helps Right Wrongs

Getting the word out about human rights issues is important. Along with funding from the Human Rights and Education Multiculturalism Fund, the Alberta Human Rights Commission (AHRC) worked with the Calgary-based Urban Society for Aboriginal Youth (USAY) to develop a special edition of *New Tribe* magazine called *Rights Write*.



New Tribe is a monthly magazine that provides a voice for Aboriginal youth. The *Rights Write* special edition concentrates on issues relating to stereotypes, racism, discrimination, equality and human rights issues impacting Aboriginal communities. One of the many aims of this project is to help the AHRC better reach out to individuals who may not be aware of their rights or of services provided by the AHRC. The *Rights Write* edition will be used by the AHRC and by organizations throughout the province as a human rights tool. The *New Tribe Special Edition II: Rights Write* is available online at USAY's website at usay.ca.

"We want to empower our youth with the tools to help themselves when they are faced with difficult situations involving racism or discrimination. We want readers to understand that there is a way to stand up for yourself that doesn't involve your fists."

– Rachel Paris, Program Manager, USAY

Conclusion

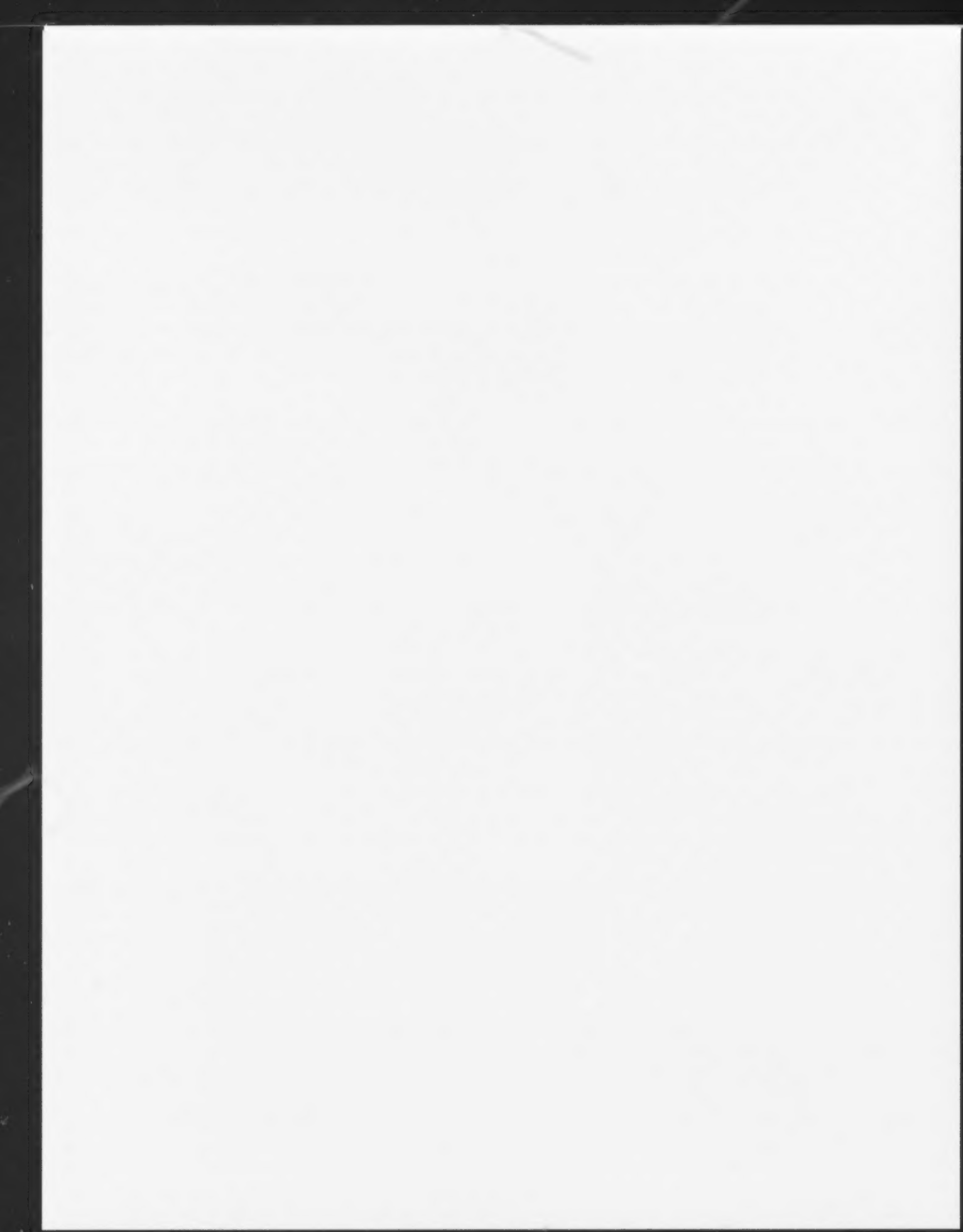
"We have learned that each community is unique, with its own strengths and challenges . . . and there is unlimited potential in the fastest growing and youngest segment of Alberta's population."⁸



The activities highlighted in this report are an indication that results are being achieved in Aboriginal labour force and economic development in Alberta. Government departments, Aboriginal communities, educational institutions, community service providers, and industry are coming together in partnership to connect the dots between what's available and what's missing, to find solutions, and to make change. There is also a renewed urgency around the need to support young Aboriginal Albertans to be successful in school and the workplace.

Some activities and highlights included in this progress report are examples of small steps, others are part of a transformational change. It's obvious that the desire to collaborate to make real change for Aboriginal people is stronger than ever. Increasing the participation of Aboriginal people in Alberta's workforce and economy and closing the socio-economic gaps will continue to be a priority for the Government of Alberta.

⁸ Verlyn Olson, MLA Wetaskiwin-Camrose, Chair, MLA Committee on the First Nations, Metis and Inuit Workforce Planning Initiative (*Connecting the Dots*, P. 3)



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